



Bell and Wee Win the Day

Dawn Henry reports on an exciting day of racing at Rohto Ironman 70.3 Hawai'i

The Kohala Coast sparkled today as nearly 1,500 triathletes took to the Rohto Ironman 70.3 Hawai'i course in inspired fashion. The word of the day from age-groupers and professionals alike was "awesome!"

The field gathered on the impeccable white sand of Hapuna Beach State Park for the single-loop swim course as the rising sun warmed the shoulders of a crowd grooving to the laid back Hawaiian-style atmosphere. Family members held signs and children played on boogie boards in the gentle swells along the shoreline. A few minutes before the mass start, the wind picked up and tussled the surface of the water, but it turned out to be only a friendly greeting. The island welcomed today's racers with a gentle sea, intermittent headwinds on the bike course and dialed back heat and humidity.

The field surged into the bay at the sound of the cannon and it didn't take long for professional John Flanagan III, from Oahu, Hawai'i, to create a gap between himself and the rest of the competitors. Flanagan exited the water in 23:56, leading Australian Luke Bell and fellow Oahu resident Timothy Marr by 80 seconds. Two minutes off the lead, Americans Chris and Matt Lieto made their way onto the sand along with a small group of age-group men. Ian Mikelson was next out of the water in 27:23. Big Island resident Bree Wee was first out of the water for the professional women's field in 27:43, followed closely by Australian Elly Franks.

On the bike course, Flanagan, Marr and Bell battled along the Queen Ka'ahumanu Highway, working to stay ahead of the Lieto brothers. The initial miles unwound along a quiet coast; the winds held off and the nearby Pacific Ocean lay flat and reflected deep blue. As the course made its way through the harbor town of Kawaihae, and the racers took on the Akoni Pule Highway toward Hawi, the top men rode the rolling, rising climbs like a freight train. As the racers neared Hawi, headwinds blew in gusts against the riders, but they apparently failed to slow the leaders. Bell, leading the way, made the uphill climb into the headwind look easy. Chris Lieto, with brother Matt close behind, were able to reel in Flanagan and Marr. Chris Lieto and Bell took the turnaround close together. As the lead men raced back toward the oasis of T2 on the grounds of The Fairmont Orchid, Hawai'i, Lieto managed to gain a lead of almost two minutes on Bell. Matt Lieto came into T2 in third place, 90 seconds back from Bell. Marr and Flanagan followed.

With blue skies overhead, and a gentle breeze playing along the undulating run course, the baking hot sun made its presence known. Lieto maintained his 1:30 lead in front of Bell for the first seven miles of the course, until his pace slowed and Bell saw his chance to gain ground. Miles nine through eleven of the race take place on a straightaway out-and-back reminiscent of the Energy Lab in the Ford Ironman World Championship. Lieto and Bell entered the mini-Energy Lab inferno less than 30 seconds apart. Bell made his move at the turn-around at mile ten, keeping ahead of Lieto through the steamy climb back to the golf course and toward the finish line. Bell crossed the line for the win in 3:58:14, with Chris Lieto in second at 4:01:32. Matt Lieto held strong for third in 4:05:25. Ian Mikelson caught Marr in the last few miles of the course to take fourth in 4:11:21, while Marr rounded out the top five in 4:12:16. Flanagan came next in sixth.



Bell characterized his race against Lieto after his pass at mile ten as “a drag race” for the top of the climb. “I was on the rivets; I wasn’t saving anything out there.” Bell wins here just two weeks after taking third at the Hermann Memorial Ironman Texas and says of his racing that he’s “had a good start to the year this year.” Bell finished second here last year in 4:05:29.



Chris Lieto says that he had “a tough day, but a good day.” Hampered two weeks ago at Memorial Hermann Ironman Texas by an Achilles tendon injury, Lieto said he was blessed to run without problems with his Achilles today. He garnered plenty of local support as he and his family have been living on the Big Island for the past seven months. Matt Lieto, who made an effort to keep up with his brother on the first half of the bike course, says that this year’s race “felt a lot faster on the bike.” He says he suffered some cramping on the run course, but was able to hold off the rest of the field to keep his third place position.

Sami Inkinen, from San Francisco, was the first age-grouper to cross the line. He finished in seventh place overall. He says this was his third time racing in Honu and he went into the race with a specific strategy to keep his core temperature down in the heat, allocating his power efforts accordingly. He says he “hammered on the bike and then paced the run.”



The women’s race came down to the wire as age-groupers and professionals both vied for the win. Elly Franks led the field for most of the bike course and was the first woman into T2. She held her lead through mile ten of the run as other top women swapped places behind her, but ultimately faded to place fourth. Age-grouper Sheila Croft, from Redmond, California, says she was sixth overall at T2, but made her way through the women’s field to lead briefly in the last miles of the race before being passed by Bree Wee. Wee held on to capture her first 70.3 title in 4:42:32.

Wee says she was vomiting on the bike course and could not take in calories for much of the race. At mile three on the run course, she started to keep down calories. She says she was “in survival mode” until mile ten in the run, when she felt her strength returning. She decided to go for the win. “I decided, ‘Alright, I’m going to give it a go.’” Wee says she was encouraged by her friends and the volunteers on the course who cheered her along. “No one from the Big Island has ever won Honu until today,” says Wee. “I’m so excited. I never hurt so much, I never hurt so good.” Age-grouper

Susanne Davis, from Carlsbad, California, took third. Franks held on for fourth and Canadian Christine Fletcher took fifth.

The athletes we profiled in the weeks leading up to the race had a great day of racing. Rohto Ironman 70.3 Hawai`i partners and competitors took the race by storm. Ryan Dolan, from TYR, finished in 4:54:36. Dustin Brady, from Shimano, finished his first ever triathlon in 7:43:33, and Grant Miller, from Bike Works, finished in 5:21:52. Dirk Vlieds, the indomitable age-grouper who returned to Honu after suffering from a life-threatening stroke on the course five years ago, finished today in 6:57:53. And Big Island resident and illustrator for Ford Ironman World Championship materials, Alika Ho`omana, finished his second Honu today in 6:24:55.

